

Cold Nights of Childhood

Tezer Özlü

Maureen Freely, Translator

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Tezer Özlü's *Cold Nights of Childhood* is a work of autofiction that spans decades, cities, and one woman's many lives.

A woman grows up in restrictive Istanbul in the 1950s and 1960s. She battles depression. She begins her story with the recollection of a ritual: her father waking the family up each morning in the city. She then jumps back in time to discuss their years in the provinces of Turkey. From there on, she continues to navigate her story via associations, with every minute detail leading to a different time, a different space.

The girl's memories include her Catholic school years under oppressive nuns, her distance from the literary circles her brother hangs out in, encounters with misogyny, a failed marriage, a different marriage, years being freer in Berlin, time in Paris, and time spent locked up in a mental hospital where she is abused and treated with electroshock therapy. Her complicated lifetime is encompassed in long pauses and fast forwards and fast rewinds. In the concluding pages of the book, she sits on the beach and ruminates over one "moment stretching out to embrace all time."

The puzzle of the narrator's life is incomplete, even impossible to decipher at times. Her story is suggestive rather than explanatory, but also engagingly descriptive. It satisfies a different kind of curiosity: the question of what can be made of a person's tale rather than of merely what it is. The emotions of the tale fill in the information gaps that are left by its nonlinear, erratic structure. It answers a question that was not asked, but perhaps should have been: What does living feel like?

Cold Nights of Childhood is a singular work of autofiction that dips in and out of scattered memories, introducing a narrative of self that's not beholden to linearity.

MICHAEL ELIAS (May / June 2023)

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